



# Safe Kids in Healthy Families

## Fundamental changes underway in the child welfare system

### Kids Come First, Phase II:

#### Child safety is the top priority

- Children at high risk for abuse and neglect will be seen by social workers within 24 hours of a concern about child safety. This new timeframe is a major improvement in the current requirement to see children within 10 days. All other children at less risk will be seen within 72 hours of a referral.
- The timeframe for CPS investigations will be reduced from 90 to 75 days.
- In-person visitations between social workers, the child and foster families will increase to once every 30 days from once every 90 days.
- Responsibility for permanency planning will be transferred from Child Protective Services (CPS)\* to Child Welfare Services (CWS)\* in 72 hours.

- Families needing in-home services will have their cases transferred by CPS to a new CWS in-home services program within 75 days of the referral.

(CPS\* workers investigate allegations of abuse or neglect and place children in emergency out-of-home care if needed. CWS\* workers handle the long-term plan for the future of the child.)

#### Protecting children is a community effort requiring family and neighborhood partnerships

- Birth parents, foster parents, the child if appropriate, social workers and other family members or caregivers will meet to determine whether the family can be preserved or whether an out-of-home placement is necessary.
- If removal from a family is necessary for a child's safety, team members will be able to suggest where the child should live.
- Workers will be required to quickly identify and engage relatives, particularly absent fathers, in making decisions regarding their children.
- A system for resolving disagreements in meetings will be designed.
- Culturally appropriate and individually tailored services for children, families and kinship providers will increase.

- The quality and frequency of social worker contact with children, parents and caregivers will increase.
- The quality and frequency of visits between children, parents and brothers and sisters will improve.
- Strategies to appropriately match children and caregivers during the initial out-of-home placement will be developed.
- An after-hours crisis support line for caregivers will be developed.
- New training will improve foster parent and social worker relationships.

#### Appropriate services today will help adolescents become responsible adults

- A new policy will be developed to allow adolescents to remain in care until age 21 if they are in college.
- A Foster Care to College Partnership Plan with Washington Educational Association will be in place to help more foster children enter college.
- Strategies, such as partnerships with school districts, will be developed to help adolescents earn high school diplomas.
- A Parent Aid Program will be designed to increase visitations, facilitate access to services and improve parenting skills.
- A statewide interagency domestic violence protocol will be developed.
- A youth advisory group of foster children will be re-established.
- Chemical dependency experts will be placed in select offices to improve social work training around chemical dependency issues.

# Kids Come First, Phase II,

is a practical plan to make the state's child welfare system more effective and accountable.

## Families

### Why improvements needed

■ Current system and limited resources can jeopardize the health and safety of abused and neglected children.

- We need to leverage the limited dollars available to children and their families.
- We must capitalize on the latest research, best practices and technology.

### Immediate results from Kids Comes First

- Safety of children continues to be the top priority.
- Social workers will spend more time with children and families.
- Children will get the services they need most and when they are most effective.
- Foster parents and other partners get the support they need and deserve.
- Better data, improved decision making and a streamlined structure will better serve children.

### Long-term results from Kids Come First

- Children will have the best opportunities to become responsible adults and parents.
- Unnecessary and avoidable costs associated with child welfare litigation will be reduced.
- State spending on prisons and other services associated with the long-term effects of child abuse and neglect will be reduced.
- Effective partnerships with mental health, juvenile justice, substance abuse and antipoverty programs will improve outcomes for success.

# Kids Come First, Phase II,

will empower families and help build safe communities and neighborhoods. It will help:

- Keep children safe in their own communities;
- Find permanent, safe and stable homes for children in state care, while preserving strong family connections;
- Engage families in case planning and decision making;
- Expand services for adolescents so they can successfully transition into adulthood;
- Increase kinship care and support for caregivers;
- Recruit and retain foster and kinship families;
- Increase consultation and collaboration with our partners to better serve children and families in their own communities;
- Refine services and accessibility to better meet the needs of children and families in their own homes and when children come into state care;
- Refine the DSHS Children's Administration commitment to quality assurance methods that set high standards in child welfare practice;
- Update the department's antiquated child welfare information system, bringing more accountability by using data-driven, outcome-based decision making.

Visit the Kids Come First web site at:  
[http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/about/imp\\_KCF2.asp](http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/about/imp_KCF2.asp)



# Kids Come First : Phase II

## Safe Kids in Healthy Families



Washington State  
Department of Social  
and Health Services